

FINAL
ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

NEW BEDFORD AND FAIRHAVEN HARBOR
MASSACHUSETTS

Prepared by
DEPT. OF THE ARMY, NEW ENGLAND DIVISION, CORPS OF ENGINEERS, WALTHAM, MASS.
13 July 1971

NEW BEDFORD AND FAIRHAVEN HARBOR
MASSACHUSETTS

() Draft (x) Final Environmental Statement

Responsible Office: U.S. Army Engineer Division, New England

1. Name of Action: (x) Administrative () Legislative

2. Description of Action: The proposed navigation project is for New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbor, Bristol County, Massachusetts providing channel improvements consisting of: widening one section of channel to have dimensions 1,100 feet long by 15 feet deep by 100 feet wide; deepening another section of channel to have dimensions 900 feet long by 15 feet deep by 100 feet wide; and extending the channel 600 feet with a width of 100 feet and a depth of 6 feet.

3. a. Environmental Impacts: Temporary silting and increased turbidity during dredging, possible effects due to the disposal of the dredged material, improved boating conditions, and increased prospects for the local economy.

b. Adverse Environmental Impacts: Effects associated with dredging and disposal of the dredged material.

4. Alternatives: "No action".

5. Comments Received:

Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
National Marine Fisheries Service
Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources
City of New Bedford

6. Draft statement sent to C.E.Q. ____.

Final statement sent to C.E.Q. ____.

1. Project Description. The proposed navigation project for New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbor provides for channel improvements along the Fairhaven waterfront which consists of: widening 1,100-foot long section of the existing 15-foot deep channel by 100 feet; deepening the 900-foot long, 10-foot deep channel to 15 feet and widening it by 100 feet; and extending the existing channel by 600 feet, to a width of 100 feet and a depth of 6 feet.

The project will involve the dredging and disposal of about 75,000 cubic yards of silt and sand. The dredged material will be subject to tests to compare the dredge sediments with the criteria established by the Water Quality Office of the Environmental Protection Agency for determining acceptability of dredged spoil disposal to the nation's waters.

The purpose of the project is threefold. First, in recent years there have been numerous groundings of fishing boats along the existing 15-foot channel, with resulting vessel damage, due to a channel width inadequate for safe maneuvering to the berths and marine railways in the area. The proposed channel widening will materially correct, if not eliminate, this condition.

Second, the upstream 900-foot long section of the existing channel, with its depth of 10 feet, is inadequate for navigation by commercial fishing craft. Channel deepening to 15 feet, as proposed, will allow the development of this section of waterfront for commercial fishing operations and alleviate present congestion of boat traffic in the area.

Third, the proposed 600-foot long extension of the existing channel, to a 6-foot depth, will provide adequate water depths at all tides for recreational boats using the State Boat ramp and Pier, and a large private marina in the area.

The benefit to cost ratio is 1.4.

2. Environmental Setting without the Project. The city of New Bedford is a highly industrialized community with a population of about 101,000. Its economy is based primarily on the manufacture of textiles and finished goods, with retail and wholesale trade, and commercial fishing operations playing important roles.

Fairhaven is a combination residential suburb of New Bedford and summer resort on Buzzards Bay with a population of about 16,000. Its principal industry is the repair, servicing and storage of fishing boats and yachts, including the harbor's fishing fleet of 180 boats. This work is done in four large boatyards located in the project vicinity.

Commercially the harbor is essentially a receiving port for fish and petroleum. In 1968, it was the leading fishing port in New England in total volume (127 million pounds) and ex-vessel value (\$18,900,000). In recent years recreational boating in the harbor has increased considerably.

New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbor is a tidal estuary at the mouth of the Acushnet River located on the northwesterly side of Buzzards Bay, about 20 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. It is comprised of three distinct areas: the outer harbor, 2 miles wide and extending from the bay a distance of 2 1/4 miles to a hurricane barrier with a 150-foot gated opening; the inner or main harbor, 2/3 mile wide and extending from the barrier northerly 1 1/4 miles to the Route 6 highway swing bridge; and the upper harbor, 1/2 mile wide and extending from the Route 6 bridge a distance of 1 1/4 miles to the Coggeshall Street bridge. The project site is located along the easterly side of the inner or main harbor.

Extensive dredging work has been done throughout the harbor during the last 131 years by the Federal Government, State and bordering municipalities. Prior to initial improvement by the Government in 1839, the natural depths to the wharves were about 12 feet at mean low water.

Since that time the Government has dredged a 5 mile long, 350 foot wide and 30-foot deep main ship channel from the bay to just above the Route 6 bridge. It has also dredged branch channels and three large anchorages to service the inner and upper harbor terminals.

The State in 1920 dredged a channel about a mile long from the Route 6 bridge to the Coggeshall Street bridge. During the last five years the State and local municipalities have dredged two large anchorages and have also dredged all berths along the commercial waterfront area of Fairhaven, to a 15-foot depth.

The dredging work over the last century has involved the removal of about 3 to 4 million cubic yards of sand, silt and rock. The bulk of the dredged material was disposed of at offshore dumping areas in Buzzards Bay with no known adverse affects to the environment.

The tidal portion of the Achushnet River enclosed by the hurricane barrier, which includes the main and upper portions of the harbor and the project site, covers an area of 1,070 acres. The tidal fluctuations in this area involve a mean tide range of 3.7 feet, the same as in the outer harbor. Thus the harbor above the barrier is flushed with nearly 4,000 acre feet (1.3 billion gallons) of water twice a day.

Tidal currents in the harbor are weak except through the barrier's opening where the maximum velocities are about 2.4 knots. There are no significant fishing activities in the vicinity of the project site.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and the Division of Fisheries and Game, reported that "Sportfishery and shellfishery resources within the Acushnet River estuary are limited due to gross pollution; however, pollution abatement programs currently underway should help restore sportfishery and shellfishery resources and increase sport fishing and clamming opportunities."

3. The Environmental Impact of the Proposed Action. The proposed channel improvements will cause some slight temporary environmental changes within close proximity of the project site and at the off-shore disposal area. However, no permanent changes are expected to occur.

During dredging there could be a relatively small amount of silting of areas adjacent to the channel. Such silting is not expected to be harmful to the environment. Dredging could release some gases from organic sediments and result in some offensive odors. This would be only a temporary nuisance since there should be rapid dissipation.

Present plans call for the disposal of the dredged materials at an offshore location. However, the Massachusetts Division of Mineral Resources suggested that the materials be used in construction as fill, if suitable. The actual location, whether onshore or off-shore, will be determined in cooperation with the appropriate Federal and State agencies during the advance planning stage.

During project planning, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Game, reported that,

a. "No significant fish and wildlife losses were expected to result from enlarging and deepening existing channels, turning basins and anchorages, since the anticipated improvements would not encroach on the shoal areas of value to fish and wildlife upstream and downstream from the busy port area."

b. "No wetland of significant value is located within the area."

c. "...a suitable offshore spoil area be selected....during advanced planning stages."

4. Any Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot be Avoided Should the Plan be Implemented. As mentioned earlier, the dredging may cause additional siltation of areas adjacent to the channel, along with the release of offensive gases from organic sediments. Both of these conditions will prevail only during the dredging and be of a minor extent.

The disposal of the dredged material may affect fish and wild-life resources in the spoil vicinity because of the pollutants contained in the material. A loss of shellfish habitat or productive marshland (if onshore) may also result. During the advance planning stage a site will be determined so that these effects will be minimized. Also, the dredged material will be tested in accordance with the guidelines set by the Federal Water Quality Administration to determine the suitability of the material for disposal.

5. Alternatives to the Proposed Action. The plan for the proposed project was formulated to provide for the needs of both commercial navigation and recreational boating for a longer, wider and deeper channel along the Fairhaven waterfront. This plan is an alternate in the sense that it was included with several other proposals considered for navigational improvements of New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbor. The impact of an enlarged project was not greater than that anticipated for the current proposal.

Topography and existing waterfront developments precludes the alternate of a relocated channel.

If the project is not undertaken the existing unfavorable conditions would continue to prevail. Larger recreational boats using the State boat ramp and pier, and the private marina, could only navigate to these facilities at the upper half stage of tide. Commercial fishing boats would continue to ground and sustain boat damage in maneuvering to their berths in the vicinity of the Old South Wharf. The waterfront area along the upper 900-foot long section of the existing channel would continue to be unsuitable for commercial fishing operations.

6. The Relationship Between Short-Term Uses of Man's Environment and the Maintenance and Enhancement of Long-Term Productivity. The proposed project will benefit the commercial navigation and the fishing industry, thus enhancing the area's present and future economy. It will also improve facilities for recreational boating, thus improving the health and well-being of a great many people. The environment of the area has already been committed to serve the needs of the fishing industry, sea borne transportation, and recreational boating. Those uses, therefore, are the best long-term uses which can be accommodated at this time. Development of the harbor for more efficient use will further promote the long-term use.

7. Any Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources Which Would be Involved in the Proposed Action Should It be Implemented. The natural environmental resources of the area have already been committed to commercial and recreational boating. The only commitment that the project would make would be the area designated for disposal of the dredged material and the labor involved to implement the project.

8. Coordination With Other Agencies. Coordination has been maintained throughout the course of the study with Federal, State and local agencies which have responsibilities or interests in the project. Included were the following.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U. S. Coast Guard
Massachusetts Department of Public Works
City of New Bedford
Town of Fairhaven
New Bedford-Fairhaven Harbor Commission

A draft of the environmental statement was furnished to the Federal Water Quality Administration, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, National Marine Fisheries Service, U. S. Coast Guard, Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources, Massachusetts Audubon Society, City of New Bedford and the Town of Fairhaven.

The Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources coordinates the State review of the draft with several State agencies that have particular expertise or interest in matters related to the project.

This statement has been revised to include agency comments the major points of which are summarized below.

a. Federal Water Quality Administration

Comment: None received in connection with the project.

b. Bureau of Outdoor Recreation

Comment: The statement should be impartial as possible in evaluating both the favorable and unfavorable impacts.

Response: This point is well taken and the statement has been revised accordingly.

Comment: Additional information on the possible adverse effects, especially those associated with dredging operations, would be helpful along with a map showing the locations of possible disposal sites.

Response: The statement has been expanded to include a greater discussion of the environmental impacts especially the effects of dredging. The spoil areas will be considered during the advanced planning stages of the project.

c. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

Comment: No comments received in connection with this project.

d. National Marine Fisheries Service

Comment: No comments to offer in connection with this project.

e. U. S. Coast Guard

Comment: No comments received in connection with this project.

f. Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources

Comment: The Department coordinated the State review and those agencies which responded generally concur with the statement.

Comment: The Division of Mineral Resources suggests that dredged material, if suitable be utilized as on shore fill for construction purposes instead of being dumped at sea.

Response: This information has been noted and is now incorporated in the statement.

Comment: The Department of Public Works reports that the project be given a high priority because of the benefits to local marine resources, local economy and the New England economy.

Comment: The Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District reports that the Board of Selectmen in Fairhaven and the New Bedford-Fairhaven Harbor Commission have given approval to the project.

Comment: The Division of Marine Fisheries and the Division of Fisheries and Game concur with the statement.

g. Massachusetts Audubon Society

Comment: No comments received in connection with the project.

h. City of New Bedford

Comment: Mayor G. Rogers, in behalf of the City of New Bedford, commented that he found nothing controversial concerning the impact statement and the effects of the project on the environment.

i. Town of Fairhaven

Comment: No comments received in connection with the project.



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF OUTDOOR RECREATION
FEDERAL BUILDING
1421 CHERRY STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19102

IN REPLY REFER TO:

June 22, 1971

Colonel Frank P. Bane
New England Division, Corps
of Engineers
424 Trapelo Road
Waltham, Massachusetts 02154

Dear Colonel Bane:

We have reviewed the draft environmental statement for the New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbor (Massachusetts) navigation project and offer the following comments.

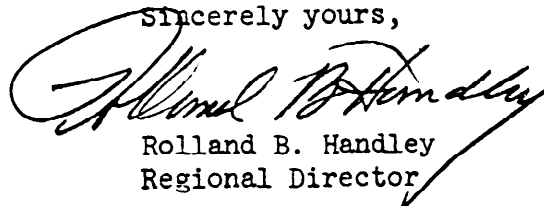
The statement is generally oriented toward justifying the project rather than evaluating the impacts that it may have on the environment. The statement should attempt to assess, as impartially as possible, the impacts, both favorable and unfavorable, of project implementation.

The section on unavoidable adverse environmental effects did not identify or discuss any possible unfavorable impacts. Those potentially adverse impacts which have been identified, such as those resulting from dredging, should be included in this section.

A discussion of the choices of sites for spoil disposal, the possible impacts of each, and ways of minimizing adverse effects should be included in the statement.

These comments have been provided for technical assistance purposes. We hope that they will be useful as you further develop the draft environmental statement.

Sincerely yours,


Rolland B. Handley
Regional Director



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Federal Building - 14 Elm Street
Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930

July 1, 1971

Mr. John Wm. Leslie (NEDED-R)
Chief, Engineering Division
Department of the Army
Corps of Engineers
424 Trapelo Road
Waltham, Massachusetts 02154

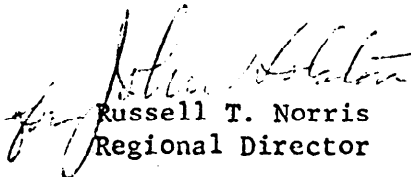
Dear Mr. Leslie:

We have reviewed your draft environmental statement on the proposed navigation project at New Bedford and Fairhaven, Massachusetts, dated 14 May, 1971.

We have no comments to offer on this statement at the present time. Should new information require us to comment, we will so advise you. Also, the draft statement, as submitted, will be forwarded to our Washington Office for review.

We appreciate having had the opportunity to review the statement on this project.

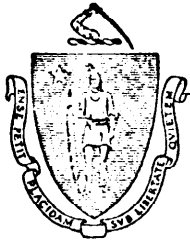
Sincerely yours,


Russell T. Norris
Regional Director

cc: F122 Ecosystem Quality Division, NMFS, Washington, D. C. 20235



A Century of Fish Conservation



ARTHUR W. BROWNELL
COMMISSIONER

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Department of Natural Resources

Leverett Saltonstall Building

100 Cambridge Street, Boston 02202

E H G

June 23, 1971

Mr. John W. Leslie
Chief, Engineering Division
Department of the Army
N.E.D. Corps of Engineers
424 Trapelo Road
Waltham, Massachusetts 02154

Dear Mr. Leslie:

The Department of Natural Resources has reviewed the draft environmental statement for the New Bedford-Fairhaven Harbor navigation project. The agencies that have provided a review generally concur with the statement as presented. The Division of Mineral Resources has suggested that any suitable dredged material be utilized for on-shore construction fill purpose, rather than be dumped at sea. The feasibility of this proposal should be given serious consideration in this and future federal dredging projects.

The comments of each responding agency are enclosed.

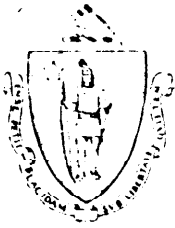
Thank you for the opportunity of providing a review of the environmental statement.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Arthur W. Brownell', written over a large, stylized 'A' and 'B'.

Arthur W. Brownell
Commissioner

AWB:CEW/smg



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Department of Natural Resources

Division of Mineral Resources

*Leverett Saltonstall Building, Government Center
100 Cambridge Street, Boston 02202*

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CE-14

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Charles P. Kennedy, Director, Water Resources

FROM: Robert C. Blumberg, Director, Mineral Resources

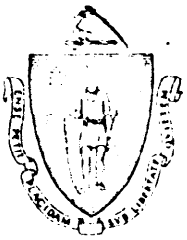
DATE: June 2, 1971

SUBJECT: New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbor Project.

The Division of Mineral Resources makes the following comments on the New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbor project. The project involves the dredging and disposal of approximately seventy-five thousand cubic yards of silt and sand. The Division feels that disposal areas are in short supply and are rapidly being filled. With this in mind any material that may be used in construction projects or in any other way should not be dumped in existing disposal sites. Investigation should be made in regard to this and all similar projects to determine whether the dredged silt, sand and gravel may be used in the aforementioned manner.

Robert C Blumberg

Robert C. Blumberg, Director



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Department of Public Works

Office of the Commissioner

100 Nashua Street, Boston 02114

June 3, 1971

Charles F. Kennedy, Director and Chief Engineer
Water Resources Commission
100 Cambridge Street,
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

Re: CE-14 New Bedford & Fairhaven Harbors

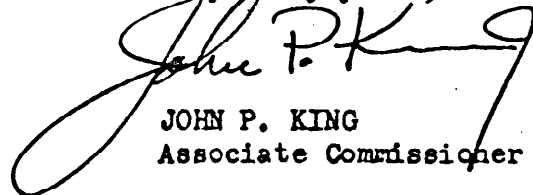
This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated May 25, 1971 together with the "Draft Environmental Statement Report" pertaining to the proposed Federal navigation project for New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbors.

Since we have an abiding interest in this harbor, we have studied the statement in detail and carefully considered all phases of the report.

We believe that this project should be given a high priority, not only because of the local marine and economic benefits but also because of the beneficial effects on the New England economy as well.

We shall be pleased to cooperate with the Water Resources Commission and the Corps of Engineers to advance the proposed work to the construction stage at an early date.

Very truly yours,


JOHN P. KING
Associate Commissioner

MAS/emn

OUTHEASTERN REGIONAL PLAI
CONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WINTHROP STREET, TAUNTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02780 TEL. (617) 823-0796

June 14, 1971

Mr. Charles F. Kennedy
Director & Chief Engineer
Water Resources Commission
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02202

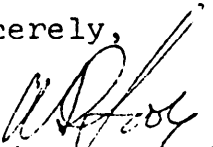
Dear Mr. Kennedy:

The Staff of the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District has reviewed the proposal providing for channel improvements for New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbor, and has no comments on the proposal.

It is noted that approval to the project has been given by both the Board of Selectmen in Fairhaven and the New Bedford-Fairhaven Harbor Commission.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,


William D. Toole
Executive Director

SS:WDT:ler



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Department of Natural Resources

Division of Marine Fisheries

State Office Building, Government Center

100 Cambridge Street, Boston 02202

May 27, 1971

CE-14

Mr. Charles F. Kennedy
Director
Division of Water Resources
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02202

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

The Division of Marine Fisheries has no objection to the Environmental Statement pertaining to the New Bedford and Fairhaven Channel Improvement Project.

Sincerely,

Frank Grice

Frank Grice
Director

WJ/rfb



JAMES M. SHEPARD
DIRECTOR

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Fisheries and Game

Leverett Saltonstall Building, Government Center

100 Cambridge Street, Boston 02202

Shepard
June 4

June 4, 1971

Mr. Charles F. Kennedy
Director and Chief Engineer
Department of Natural Resources
Division of Water Resources
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02202

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

Re: CE-14

This letter responds to your request for our comments relative to the Environmental Statement (CE-14) for the New Bedford and Fairhaven Harbor Massachusetts as prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Please be advised that the Division of Fisheries and Game does not anticipate any adverse effects upon our inland fish and wildlife resources as a result of this proposed project; therefore, we concur with the aforementioned statement.

We appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on this report.

Sincerely yours

James M. Shepard
James M. Shepard
DIRECTOR

JMS/AWN:cms

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CSA

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF WATER RESOURCES



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
MAYOR GEORGE ROGERS



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
2ND BRISTOL DISTRICT
WARDS 3-4-5-6
CHAIRMAN, HOUSE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

"HISTORIC NEW BEDFORD"

June 7, 1971

E. P. Stefanik, Colonel
Deputy Division Engineer
Department of the Army
New England Division, Corps of Engineers
424 Trapelo Road
Waltham, Massachusetts 02154

Subj: Draft of Environmental Statement
New Bedford and Fairhaven Navigation Project

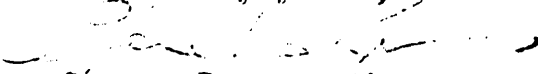
Dear Colonel Stefanik:

Reference is made to your letter dated 20 May 1971 which forwarded your draft of the environmental statement for the New Bedford-Fairhaven Navigation Project.

I find nothing controversial concerning the impact upon the environment of the proposed channel improvements in the Town of Fairhaven. I am cognizant of the problems in connection with the selection of suitable dumping areas in Buzzards Bay and trust that this matter will receive your consideration.

The degree of coordination required with State and Federal Agencies concerning the impact upon the environment from projects of this type is recognized and appreciated.

Very truly yours,


George Rogers, Mayor
City of New Bedford

